A Study of Virtual Reality Used as a Treatment for Specific Phobias and Agoraphobia

Michael Reynolds
Mentor: Dr. Jennifer Guinta
Department of Psychology, College of Staten Island

Objective
To compile and analyze multiple studies based on the effect of virtual reality therapy when used as a treatment for both specific phobias and agoraphobia.

Introduction
Millions of Americans suffer from either specific phobias or agoraphobia. These phobias can often times be debilitating and cause restrictions in how people live their lives. While traditional treatments include cognitive therapy and exposure therapy, a new type of treatment has been used in recent years. Virtual reality therapy (VR therapy) has been a form of treatment that has been looked at by many researchers. It allows patients to be able to be exposed to their fears in a controlled setting without actually being in their presence.

Method
Using the College of Staten Island’s online database, 15 articles were compiled on both the effect of virtual reality therapy on specific phobias and the effect of virtual reality therapy on agoraphobia. Each source was analyzed in order to draw conclusions on the efficacy of virtual reality therapy on various disorders.

Results
Studies have shown that virtual reality therapy is a promising treatment for both specific phobias and agoraphobia. It is often seen as both an appealing and effective method of treatment. The studies also suggest that it can be used in combination with other methods in order to amplify efficacy.

Significance
This study is significant because of the real world implications that it has. Virtual reality therapy has been able to help people face their fears. It’s seen as an attractive alternative to other treatments such as real life exposure therapy. Since patients don’t actually have to be in the presence of the stimuli, it can be seen as a safer alternative to in person exposure therapy. It also allows therapists to create scenarios that wouldn’t be possible to experience with normal exposure therapy. The growing popularity of virtual reality technology may even allow people to use this therapy from their own home in the future as the technology becomes more widely available to the public.

References